DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 297 795 JC 880 324

AUTHOR Platt, Gail M.
TITLE A Commitment to Literacy: The Learning Center's Annual Report, 1986-87.
INSTITUTION South Plains Coll., Levelland, Tex.
PUB DATE 87
NOTE 46p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Basic Skills; Community Colleges; Educational Testing; *Independent Study; *Learning Laboratories; Program Descriptions; *Remedial Programs; *Tutorial Programs; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

This report provides a comprehensive description and record of all academic support services provided to students through the South Plains College Learning Center. After an introductory statement clarifies the ever-increasing need for academic support services at open-door institutions, a philosophy and mission statement and a detailed description of the various services provided through the Learning Center are presented. Those services include: (1) the assessment of entry-level skills in reading, writing, and mathematics; (2) remedial/developmental course offerings for students who are identified as having weaknesses in these basic skills; (3) tutorial services; (4) an independent learning laboratory, featuring study carrels with electronic media and instructional support materials and a microcomputer laboratory with over 600 software programs; and (5) miscellaneous services provided in the Learning Center, such as study skills seminars, student success courses, writing and math labs, and tutor training activities. The descriptions include information on the numbers of students served, usage patterns, and outcomes/results. A discussion of program goals and recommendations for the future is presented next. The report concludes with comments regarding the lowering of college standards, "special needs" students, requests for center services by non-students, and the critical issue of program funding. (Author/EJV)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED297795

A Commitment to Literacy:

The Learning Center's

Annual Report

1986-87

Gail M. Platt

Director, The Learning Center

South Plains College

Levelland, Texas

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

IC 880 324

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

G. M. Platt

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Abstract

The Learning Center's Annual Report is a comprehensive description and record of all academic support services provided to students through the South Plains College Learning Center. The introduction clarifies the ever-increasing need for academic support services at open-door institutions. The introduction is followed by a philosophy and mission statement and a detailed description of the various services provided through the Learning Center. Those services include: (a) the assessment of entry-level skills in reading, writing, and mathematics, (b) remedial/developmental course offerings for students who are identified as having weaknesses in these basic skills; (c) tutorial services; and (d) independent-study programs. The discussion also records the miscellaneous services provided in the Learning Center, such as study skills seminars, student success courses, writing and math labs, and tutor training activities. Goals and recommendations are next presented, with the report concluding with comments regarding the lowering of college standards (a need for critical literacy), "special needs" students, nonstudents' requests, and the critical issue of program funding.

C O N T E N T S

INTRODUCTION . . . . . page 3

PHILOSOPHY AND MISSION . . . . . page 5

FOUR SERVICE AREAS . . . . . page 6

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION . . . . . page 9

Assessment . . . . . page 9

Courses . . . . . page 14

Lab . . . . . page 16

Tutoring . . . . . page 18

Additional Activities . . . page 18

GOALS AND FUTURE PLANS . . . . . page 27

CONCLUDING REMARKS . . . . . page 31

Tables . . . . . page 36

Attachments . . . . . page 40

References . . . . . page 43

A COMMITMENT TO LITERACY:
THE LEARNING CENTER ANNUAL REPORT, 1986-87

South Plains College

Levelland, Texas

Introduction

Since the 1960s, the "open door" metaphor has been used to describe the admissions policy of most community colleges. This admissions policy whereby virtually all adults are allowed entry, combined with other factors such as low-cost tuitions and flexible scheduling of classes, has allowed community colleges to attract an extremely heterogenous student population, including those students who, under stringent admissions requirements, would be barred from participating in postsecondary education. Many writers in the field of education have noted that the "open door" has been instrumental in enabling members of ethnic minority groups, females, older adults, and full-time workers in the labor force, those who would normally be denied access to colleges, to continue their education and increase their potential for success in life (Cross, 1971; Garner, 1980; Jorgensen, 1980; Platt, 1986; Richardson, Fisk, & Okun, 1983).

The "open door" through which nontraditional students enter community colleges is also the threshold through which pass significant numbers of individuals who are generally characterized as not only socially and economically disadvantaged, but also lacking

basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics (Baker & Reed, 1980). In addition to the large numbers of nontraditional students attending community colleges, the academic preparation of recent high school graduates has declined significantly in the last decade, becoming both a cause for general concern and a target for public school reform mandated by state legislatures (Committee on Testing [Coordinating Board Texas College and University System], 1986; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; National Institute of Education, 1984). In simple terms, there are significant numbers of students who lack basic academic skills admitted to and enrolled in community colleges.

In response to the present situation in which large numbers of students enroll in college yet lack entry-level skills, several educators (Cohen, 1987; McGrath & Spear, 1987; Richardson, Fisk, & Okun, 1983) have cited a tendency among faculty towards lowering academic standards and diluting the college curriculum in order to give these students an illusion of success; not only does this response necessarily lower the value of a college education, it also jeopardizes the viability of maintaining an "open door", and carries serious, far-reaching implications for our nation's economic, political, and social future. Such problems are inevitable, unless alternative measures are taken. These alternatives must provide students a means for acquiring and developing the skills they need BEFORE they enroll in courses requiring college-level skills; when skill development occurs prior to enrollment at the college-level, then faculty can teach content and process to students ready and able

to profit from that instruction. Kenneth Ahrendt (1987) has warned that unless community colleges can find ways to enlist the cooperation of all faculty, staff, and administration in maintaining high academic standards and supporting alternative means of equipping underprepared students with the skills they need, the "open door" is nothing more than a revolving door.

Philosophy and Mission

The kind of cooperation described by Ahrendt (1987) is found in the partnership among faculty, staff, and administration which characterizes the history of the Learning Center on the Levelland campus of South Plains College. Having served more than 8,968 students since it opened in the fall of 1980, the Learning Center, a comprehensive academic support service, was established to provide assistance to students requiring specialized services to enhance their chances of success in college; these services were designed to promote students' development of skills relevant to all instructional areas, especially literacy skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. Thus, the Learning Center, through its four service areas, functions as a network of alternative measures.

A chief aim of the Learning Center is to enable students to develop college entry-level competencies in basic skills (including reading, writing, mathematics, and study skills) so that they can complete a college-level instructional program, achieving graduation and/or certification in a recognized field of study. Students who have not been provided a strong foundation in basic skills or who

require a learning setting different from that traditionally found in the typical college classroom may achieve success at South Plains College with the assistance provided through the Learning Center. Because the Learning Center staff believes that individuals, regardless of their present proficiency, can continue to develop higher-level and more efficient skills, it is dedicated to offering services to all students who wish to further develop their skills, including those students with better-than-average abilities enrolled in advanced courses.

Four Service Areas

The Learning Center's network includes services in four areas, described below:

1. SKILLS ASSESSMENT: This service is provided primarily at freshman orientation in August and January of each school year; however, assessment services are available upon request (from students, faculty, or counselors) throughout the year. The service includes the administration, scoring, and interpretation of various screening tests, including a standardized reading test ("The Nelson-Denny Reading Test," Form E), a spelling test, a writing sample, and the SPC Math Assessment. These tests are given to all freshmen entering academic-transfer, technical, vocational, and occupational programs who participate in Orientation 111 activities, and the results of the assessment are used, along with high school grades and college entrance test scores [(ACT and/or SAT) whenever this information is available], to provide students with an accurate

appraisal of their current academic strengths and weaknesses, enabling them to make appropriate course selections and scheduling decisions, to better choose major fields of study, and to participate in academic support services provided through the Learning Center as they find such assistance necessary or desirable. In sum, the goal of assessment is to equip students with knowledge about their own abilities as a prerequisite to their success at South Plains College.

2. COURSEWORK: Developmental courses are offered in the four instructional areas outlined below:

(a) Reading

Reading 031, Reading I, a three-hour developmental, below-college-level, non-credit course recommended to students reading below the ninth grade level, as determined by "The Nelson-Denny Reading Test," Form E;

Reading 032, Reading II, a three-hour developmental, below-college-level, non-credit course for students reading above the ninth grade level, but below college level, as determined by "The Nelson-Denny Test";

Reading 133, Reading III, a three-hour developmental, college-level, elective-credit course, specifically designed for students reading at or above college level, seeking to refine and further develop their skills in reading, especially their rate of comprehension and their critical thinking skills.

(b) Mathematics

Math 012, Developmental Math, a one-hour developmental, below-college-level non-credit course, designed specifically for

students in the vocational nursing program;

Math 033, Basic Mathematical Skills, a three-hour developmental, below-college-level, non-credit course recommended to students scoring below 34 percent on the SPC Math Assessment;

(c) English 030, a three-hour developmental, below-college-level, non-credit course, recommended to academic-transfer students who receive an unsatisfactory rating (below 5 on a scale from 1 to 10) on the writing sample and who score less than 70 percent on the spelling test;

(d) College Success Training 131, a three-hour developmental, below-college-level, non-credit course, addressing students' needs in the areas of study skills, cognitive skills acquisition and development, academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and self-management.

3. INDEPENDENT STUDY: The Learning Center maintains an independent learning lab, featuring individual study carrels with various electronic media and instructional support materials, including a micro-computer lab with over 600 software programs available for student use, ranging from a review of basic grammar and addition skills in arithmetic to dietary and nutritional analysis, organic chemistry, and word processing.

4. TUTORING: Tutorial services are provided by the Learning Center's professional staff and by peer-tutors recommended by the chairpersons and/or faculty of the departments in which tutoring is to be provided; tutoring includes one-on-one assistance as well as small-group study sessions.

Program Description

Assessment

In its seven years of providing assessment services to the students of South Plains College, 5,132 students have been served. The Learning Center began its assessment program with the use of "The Nelson-Denny Reading Test" in the fall 1980, added the SPC Basic English Test in the fall 1981, and experimented with the use of the ACT "Asset Test," with the first testing of math skills, in the spring 1984, before arriving at the decision to use the battery of tests now administered. The Learning Center staff, the counseling staff, and the members of the Student Assistance Center Advisory Committee (a group composed of faculty-representatives from each department on campus) have agreed on the use of "The Nelson-Denny Reading Test" because it is easily interpreted and used by faculty in advising; since it is a widely-used screening instrument, it makes comparisons with other community college student-populations possible. The writing sample (along with the 20-word spelling test) was chosen as the best tool for predicting student success in college composition (English 131). The Math Department has validated the use of the SPC Math Assessment, a 50-question math test requiring that students show their work in solving problems, and is well-satisfied with its reliability as well as its validity.

In the fall 1986, the Learning Center staff assessed, scored, and interpreted the reading, writing, and math skills of 612 freshmen, 132 percent more than the 469 tested in the fall 1985. In the spring 1987, 99

students were tested, comparable to the 98 students tested in the spring 1986. These figures add to a total of 711 students who were served with the assessment of basic skills in 1986-87.

Reading

The 1986-87 scores on "The Nelson-Denny Reading Test" were the lowest of the past five years; the current group produced a mean grade level of 11.0 compared to 11.7 a year ago, 11.65 in 1984-85, 11.5 in 1983-84, and 11.1 in 1982-83. [See Table 1.] A positive finding and one consistent with a trend observed over the years is that there was a slight increase in the number of students reading at or above college level (41 percent, up from 40 percent in 1985-86 and 34 percent in 1984-85). At the other end of the scale, however, and of greater concern to the Learning Center staff, is the increasing number of students whose reading deficiencies require that they be considered at "high-risk." These students, reading well below ninth grade level, are likely to fail any college-level courses offered at South Plains College [prediction based on readability studies conducted by the Learning Center staff on textbooks used in South Plains College courses]. In 1986-87, 29 percent of tested students were at "high-risk," a dramatic rise over the 23 percent so identified in 1985-86, 20 percent in 1984-85, 18 percent in 1983-84, and 22 percent in 1982-83. [See Table 2.] These numbers support a trend first identified several years ago towards greater diversity in community college populations, with increasing numbers of better-prepared students balanced by increasing numbers of students at "high-risk." [At this point, it is important to point out that conclusions based on data derived from population means

must be evaluated with caution because averages may remain relatively stable, but fail to reflect the broadening range of entry-level skills of new students.]

Overall, 50 percent of the students tested in 1986-87 read below college level and were advised to enroll in a below-college-level reading course; of those so recommended, only 36 percent chose to do so. This percentage may reflect many factors, but none so much as the impact of removing course-credit from the basic skills courses, resulting in students' increased resistance to enroll in such courses. In 1985-86 when the courses carried elective credit (with a cap on the total number of hours counting towards graduation and no credit applied towards a degree), 48 percent of the students recommended for the first two reading courses followed the recommendations: 44 percent in 1984-85, 58 percent in 1983-84, and 53 percent in 1982-83.

Writing

Of those students tested in the fall 1986 and spring 1987 using the spelling test and the writing sample, 40 percent had an unsatisfactory rating on the writing sample, but only 17 percent scored below 70 percent accuracy on the spelling test. The data indicate a dramatic increase in the number of individuals needing instruction in basic writing skills. Of the groups tested in 1986-87, 40 percent were recommended to enroll in English 030, compared to 32 percent in 1985-86, 25 percent in 1984-85, 24 percent in 1983-84, and 17 percent in 1982-83. [See Table 3.] As was the case with students needing remediation and development of reading skills, only 31 percent of the students recommended to take English 030 enrolled,

in contrast with 58 percent in 1985-86 and 1984-85, 75 percent in 1983-84, and 54 percent in 1982-83.

Mathematics

In the area of mathematics assessment, 13 percent of the students tested in 1986-87 were advised to enroll in the lowest level math course offered at South Plains College, Math 033 (consistent with 13 percent in the previous year). This 13 percent lack basic arithmetic and computational skills, such as the ability to perform addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division of whole numbers, fractions, and decimals. It is important to remember that because the Learning Center staff is responsible for math remediation only at the most basic level, the statistics compiled by the Learning Center staff do not reflect the considerable number of students who lack college-level math skills and are advised to enroll in below-college-level math courses, namely Beginning Algebra (Math 030) or Developmental Alegbra (Math 031). At most institutions, the number of students identified as lacking appropriate math skills would include those individuals taking both of these courses as well as those taking Math 033. Therefore, the 13 percent reported by the Learning Center is only a small subset of the larger population lacking college-level math skills. [In the future, the Learning Center will maintain records on all students needing below-college-level math instruction.] Additional data on math basic skills is not available as 1986-87 was only the second year for the Learning Center staff to use the SPC Math Assessment for skills assessment and course placement. However, the Math Department has used the instrument for a number of years and

reports satisfaction with the predictive value of test scores. At orientation, the Learning Center's math specialist and faculty from the Math Department consider each individual's total score on the SPC Math Assessment, the individual's conceptual understanding of mathematical operations as revealed by the work shown on the test, the individual's major field of study, and any additional background information available from the student's file.

All information about students that is available at orientation is used in making course recommendations; however, many students do not provide high school and/or college transcripts from schools previously attended, and most do not provide college entrance exam scores; therefore, in most cases, the assessment provided by the Learning Center is the only source of information about an individual's academic background and skill proficiency available at the time of advisement and registration for courses.

In summary, 70 percent of all freshmen students who participated in orientation activities in either August 1986 or January 1987 were identified as having one or more basic skill deficiencies and were recommended to enroll in at least one below-college-level skills course, compared to 65 percent a year earlier; 249 students (35 percent) were advised to enroll in only one course (either Reading 031, English 030, or Math 033); 177 students (25 percent) were recommended to enroll in two below-college-level courses; and, 69 students (9 percent) were recommended to enroll in all three of the courses listed above. [See Table 4.] This represents an overall increase in the percentages of students needing remediation as compared to the 1985-86 figures: 33 percent needing one

course, 25 percent needing two courses, and 7 percent needing all three courses; while percentages show a slight increase, actual numbers of students are more dramatic (189, 140, and 38, respectively, in 1985-86). The data reveal that one out of every 10 of our students lacks general literacy skills in reading, writing, and mathematics, and, therefore, is at "high-risk."

National statistics have indicated that between 27 and 28 percent of all college freshmen need help in reading, between 28 and 31 percent need help in writing, and 32 percent need help in mathematics; percentages are higher for freshmen at two-year schools with 32 percent needing reading, 33 percent needing writing, and 39 percent needing math (Plisko & Stern, 1985). A more extensive survey of community college students in Washington state revealed that 46-66 percent of first time students were deficient in reading, 50 to 70 percent were deficient in English skills, and 53-85 percent were deficient in math (Washington State Board for Community College, 1985). Thus, it appears that South Plains College freshmen are fairly typical of the national population; on the other hand, South Plains College seems to attract a higher percentage of better prepared students than do many community colleges across the nation.

Courses

In the fall 1986 and the spring 1987, 605 students enrolled in courses offered through the Learning Center; this was an increase of 171 students (139 percent more than the previous year). Overall, in 1986-87, math courses accounted for 14 percent of all enrollments in Learning Center courses, with 35 percent in reading, and 51 percent in English.

Preliminary analysis of Reading 031 data from the spring 1987 semester shows that the reading grade level mean score for entering students was 5.73 with a range of -3.7 to 8.6. The grade level exit mean score was 8.0 (range: -3.7 to 11.3). The average gain per student, then, was 2.27 with a range from -1.4 to 7.2. [These results are based on an enrollment of 16 with 3 of the 16 students failing the course.] These data, when compared to those from the previous year, highlight the greater weaknesses and limitations of current students. In the spring 1986, the mean entry score was 6.65 (range -3.7 to 9.6), with a mean exit score of 9.68 (range -3.6 to 13.5), and an average gain of 3.02 grade levels (range 0-5.6). [All reading scores derived from "The Nelson-Denny Reading Test," Form E (pretest) and Form F (posttest).]

All students who enroll in and complete the second level reading course (Reading 032) showed improvement; however, there was a decided difference in actual ability improvement based on two variables: initial reading ability and the student's motivation. Students who completed Reading 031 and were reading at the ninth grade level or better (but below 11.5 grade level) and students who had not had Reading 031 but were reading above the ninth grade level improved, on average, 2.5 grade levels. Students who entered the class without having reached the ninth grade level did not do as well. The other critical factor, motivation, is reflected in the student's regular attendance, completion of homework assignments, and participation in required lab activities. Students who were unwilling or unable to make an investment of time and effort in the course did not make sufficient progress (two grade levels minimum) in order to pass the course. [The majority of students who received X's this year were not going to lab and were withdrawn

from the course by the instructor.]

Representative data from both the English 030 and Math 033 courses pinpoint the crucial importance of student motivation as reflected in class attendance and participation, the completion of homework assignments, and compliance with lab requirements. In the spring 1987 English 030 courses, 57 percent of the students enrolled passed, but only 6 percent of the total enrolled earned the grade of A; 21 percent made B's, 21 percent made C's, and 9 percent made D's. Of the total enrolled, 14 percent received the grade of F while 28 percent received either X's (usually due to absenteeism) and W's.

Likewise in Math 033, only 40 percent of the students enrolled in the Spring 1987 could be termed successful inasmuch as they completed the course with the grade of A, B, or C. The Math Department has determined that for students to be successful in subsequent math courses, the grade of C or better in a prerequisite course is essential. In light of this policy, 60 percent of the students enrolled in Math 033 this spring were unsuccessful, with 12 percent failing the course, 24 percent being administratively withdrawn, and 18 percent withdrawing either on their own or upon the advice of the instructor.

Lab

In the 1986-87 academic year, the Learning Center's independent learning lab registered an availability of 16,562 hours for student use and was utilized 15,170 hours for an overall utilization rate of 92 percent (up from 83 percent in 1985-86). The drop-in utilization rate (determined from lab use by students not enrolled in courses taught in the Learning Center)

was down (79 percent utilization this year compared to 88 percent last year). This drop, however, can be explained by the fact that lab utilization by students enrolled in Learning Center courses increased by 1,503 hours for a total of 6,636 hours, thereby minimizing opportunities for other students to use the facilities. The utilization rate by students enrolled in Learning Center courses was up by 29 percent in 1986-87.

The use of the microcomputer lab doubled, for a total of 5,566 hours, a 169 percent increase. A good part of this increase is explained as a result of students' taking advantage of the lab's word processing software and using the nutritional analysis software from the home economics program (housed in the Learning Center lab).

Overall, the utilization of the Learning Center's independent study services and learning lab has gradually increased over the years, rising from 62 percent (spring 1983), to 71 percent (1983-84 and 84-85), to 83 percent (1985-86), to the present 87 percent (1986-87). The current utilization rate is based on 12,627 student visits with 2,290 students served, a 213 percent increase in the number of students served (1,073 in 1985-86 and 747 in 1984-85). [See Table 5.] These data reflect 4.6 visits per student, a decrease from the 6 visits per student in 1985-86; nonetheless, whereas students were making fewer trips to the Learning Center, they were staying longer (average length of visit: 2.38 hours compared to 1.4 in 1985-86). The fact is that students visited the Learning Center less frequently, but came in larger numbers and spent more time in the center than they had in the past.

Tutoring

In 1986-87, a total of 32 peer-tutors were employed in the Learning Center, providing assistance to 700 students (with a total of 4,618 visits). These numbers showed an increase over the 27 tutors employed in 1985-86 to help 675 students (3,570 visits). On the average, each student receiving tutorial assistance this year was tutored for 7.6 hours (compared to 5.6 hours in 1985-86). Thus, more students came for tutoring this year than in the past (104 percent more), they made more visits (129 percent more), and they spent more time with their tutor (135 percent more). These findings of growth in all service areas are consistent with data from previous years.

Data describing tutorial services appear to corroborate other observations about the student population served by South Plains College in 1986-87. It appears that more students have a greater need for assistance if they are to be successful. By and large, students seem to recognize this need (perhaps brought to their attention as a result of assessment provided by the Learning Center) and seem to be willing to expend considerable time and effort in order to attain the level of skills they need in order to succeed in their studies. [For specific information on subjects tutored and hours tutored in each subject, refer to Attachments A, B, and C.]

Additional Activities

In addition to providing services in the four operational areas already detailed, the Learning Center's staff makes available other instructional services throughout the academic year. These services include a formally-structured college course in study skills, study skills seminars, writing and math labs, tutor training activities, and various other

projects. Some of the more important activities developed by, engaged in, and offered by the Learning Center staff in 1986-87 are described briefly in this section of the Annual Report.

College Skills Training

A course jointly offered by the Learning Center and the Counseling Center is College Success Training (CST) 131. The purpose of CST is to provide students with an opportunity to learn and adopt methods to be successful in school, and the course content includes instruction and practice in memory development, time-management, reading, test-taking, note-taking, and communication skills as well as an examination of issues pertinent to college life, such as eating disorders, money management, physical exercise, substance abuse, and goal-setting. An important feature of CST is that course content allows for the invitation and participation of numerous guest speakers who can represent various viewpoints on current issues. In the spring 1987, guest speakers included Dr. Marvin Baker, President of South Plains College; Mr. Steve Beck, Director of Financial Services (SPC); Mrs. Gayla Truelock, Director of Counseling (SPC); Ms. Karen Turner, Counselor (SPC); Mrs. Dorothy Powell, Hockley County Extension Agent; Mrs. Bonnie Bartlett, Director of the Alcohol Information Center (Lubbock); Mr. David Hoehnes, Program Manager Texas Department of Health (Regional Office); Mr. Russell Hughes, Director of Cultural Affairs (Lubbock Chamber of Commerce); and, Mrs. Sharon Goldston, Certified Financial Planner. Student evaluations of this course are consistently high; verbatim

comments selected at random from an informal student evaluation form used this spring are listed below:

"I would recommend all students to have this class."

"This course has helped me to stop and see more clearly where I am. Everyone needs to know this. I wonder how many people know where they are?"

"I think everyone would benefit and improve in some way by taking this class. I really enjoyed this class."

"This course is the foundation of how to apply what you have learned and what you will be learning. This course has made me more aware of myself and what I can accomplish in life."

[In the fall semester, Sally Robinson taught one section of this course and in the spring, Gail Platt taught one section. The other sections (one in each term) were taught by Karen Turner (counselor).]

Study Skills Seminars

Last fall (1986), the Learning Center staff offered six study skills seminars on the following topics:

Getting Off to a Good Start (Sep 10)

Getting It Down (Sep 17)

Getting It Out (Sep 24)

Getting Good Grades (Oct 1)

Getting Control (Oct 8)

Getting What You Want (Oct 15).

Topics discussed at these seminars were general study skills, listening and note-taking skills, reading skills, test-taking skills, anxiety and stress management, and successful lifestyles. Each session, held during activity

period (beginning at 10:30 a.m. and lasting about 45 minutes), was open to all students on campus; the first few sessions attracted around 100 students each, with attendance decreasing to around 20 or 30 each towards the middle of the semester, with attendance averaging 55.

Writing Lab and Math Lab

Each Thursday afternoon in the fall and spring semesters (1986-87), the Learning Center sponsored writing labs, beginning on the hour at 1:00 p.m., 2:00 p.m., and 3:00 p.m. Although the labs primarily were intended to aid students enrolled in English 030 classes, all SPC students were invited to attend, and occasionally, students from English 131 or 132 did attend the labs this year. The Director of the Learning Center and English tutors were responsible for the labs, and an average of 50 students attended labs each week throughout the school year, but with attendance lower in the spring (due to lower enrollment in English 030) than in the fall.

Special labs were held on Wednesdays each semester for students unable to attend the Thursday afternoon sessions with the Director of the Learning Center (fall) and the English Specialist (spring) being responsible for these labs. At each session, an idea or concept was introduced to the students, and then they were given opportunities to write responses and receive immediate feedback, not only on the technical "correctness" of their writing, but also on the quality of their expression.

Math Labs were held Monday through Friday, from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. in the fall 1986 semester, and were primarily staffed by two second-year engineering majors tutoring in math. Half-way through the spring 1987 semester, these two tutors moved their base of operation from the Learning

Center to the Math-Science Building where they increased their hours to 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday. Math Labs were offered for students who did not make appointments, but preferred to simply walk-in and receive on-the-spot assistance. According to feedback from faculty in the Math Department, this service was a tremendous asset to students who received help, yet many students who could have benefitted from the lab failed to take advantage of it.

PPST Workshops

Two Learning Center staff members (Mary George and Robert Leahy) conducted an all-day (Saturday) workshop last fall (1986) for education majors who were planning to take the Pre-Professional Skills Test (PPST), a test required for education majors at the end of their sophomore studies as a prerequisite for enrollment in upper-level education courses. The workshop, which gave participants an opportunity to take a test similar in nature to the PPST and to review their performance on the test, included tips on taking standardized tests and dealing with test-anxiety. About 15 students participated in the Saturday session.

In the spring 1987, all Learning Center staff were involved in the PPST Workshop which was held in the afternoons over a three-day period, with a different subject-area from the test featured on each day. [The test consists of three sub-tests: reading, writing, and mathematics.] Workshops lasted two and a half to three hours each and were attended by an average of 16 students per day.

Tutor Training

An important and very time-consuming function of the Learning Center

staff is to provide training for the Learning Center's network of peer-tutors. Last fall, as has been the practice for the last three years, the staff conducted a full-day of initial tutor training activities on Saturday, September 6. All tutors were required to attend this session. At the session, students were introduced to the staff and to each other, and were given information about the Learning Center and South Plains College, along with ample opportunities to role-play various tutoring situations, to simulate study skills, to familiarize themselves with the policies and procedures of the tutor program, and to ask questions.

After the initial tutor training session, monthly meetings were scheduled for the first Friday of each month from 2:00p.m.-4:30p.m. In the fall (1986), sessions were held to discuss problem situations, specific service-components in the Learning Center, and to receive information on First Aid procedures and how to respond to emergency situations on campus. Specialized workshops in the spring (1987) included one about students with learning disabilities, in particular, dyslexia (conducted by Dr. L. G. Butler, Director of the Reading Laboratory at Texas Tech University), one on problem-solving (by Dr. Mary Tallent, Director of the Institute for the Gifted and Talented at Texas Tech University), and a panel discussion featuring tutors from previous years [Ric Bowie, graduate of Texas Tech, 1986; Darla Tubbs, Ph.D. candidate in psychology, Texas Tech; MaryAnn Sanchez, junior business major at Texas Tech; Les'lie Valentine, junior computer information major at Texas Tech]. Several SPC faculty and area public school counselors also attended Dr. Butler's presentation on learning disabilities.

Conferences

Three of the five staff members (Mary George, Robert Leahy, and Sally Robinson) attended the Texas Association of Developmental Educators' and the Western College Learning Assistance and Reading Association State Chapter's Joint-meeting in San Antonio last fall (1986). Dr. Leahy was a featured presenter at the conference, explaining the experiment in developmental reading that he conducted in 1985-86, and demonstrating the instructional computer software he developed. Response to his presentation was very positive.

In January 1987, Gail Platt conducted a one-day workshop for the faculty at Cooke County College in Gainesville, discussing student needs and service-delivery strategies. About 25 faculty from CCC attended the workshop; Mrs. Platt also provided consultation services for the Director of Counseling at CCC, William Caver.

This summer (1987), Sally Robinson will be attending the "Be Here Now" three-day workshop conducted by College Survival, Inc., in Denver, Colorado. This workshop, which is offered in support of the CST course, provides a unique opportunity for staff to learn strategies for increasing student retention and success, to meet with leaders in the field of "student success courses" (such as Dave Ellis, Lee Noel, and others), and to interact with faculty teaching similar courses at two and four-year colleges throughout the nation.

Committees

Learning Center staff served on two committees which were disbanded in 1986-87. Gail Platt served on the Professional Development Committee for

four years, and Robert Leahy was our representative on the Communication-Across-the-Curriculum Committee. There is some regret that these two committees are no longer meeting and discussing ways to address the challenges presented by these vital issues in the community college.

Two Learning Center staff members (Gail Platt and Sally Robinson) served an active role on the Math-Science Students' Support Services Committee, an ad hoc committee, created to examine how services to all SPC students, but especially those taking math and introductory chemistry classes, could be maximized. This committee approved a set of recommendations formulated by a subcommittee (chaired by the Director of the Learning Center), that addressed three policy changes pertinent to orientation procedures (related to advisement), two recommendations for student follow-up at the beginning of the fall 1987 semester, and two recommendations for pre-registration for the spring 1988. The committee also addressed the need for catalog revisions in 1988-1990.

Summer Projects

Two Learning Center staff members (Mary George and Robert Leahy) are in the process of writing a textbook for use with reading students in the fall 1987. The textbook on vocabulary skills will feature special sections on terminology and jargon relevant to technical, occupational, and academic subjects taught at South Plains College. Many of the word lists in the book were contributed by SPC faculty responding to a survey conducted by Mrs. George and Dr. Leahy in the early spring. The book should be available in the SPC bookstore this fall.

Another special project undertaken by the Learning Center staff this

summer is the offering of special short courses to ease the transition from the workplace or the home to the college setting for adult learners and the transition from high school to college for recent graduates. The first short course (to be taught by Robert Leahy), a 12-hour session (twice a week for four weeks) on general study strategies (including notetaking from textbooks and from lectures, developing study habits, and acquiring test-taking skills), will be offered from July 28 through August 20. The second workshop, team-taught by Dr. Leahy and Mary George, will focus on training vocabulary skills and will be offered in 2-hour segments semi-weekly from August 3 through August 19. These short courses are scheduled during the early evening hours so that full-time employees in the labor force may participate if they choose to do so. The third workshop, on math anxiety, and taught by Sally Robinson will be offered in the late afternoons on Tuesdays and Thursdays from August 4 through August 20. A nominal fee will be charged for each short course, following standard procedures of the Division of Continuing Education. Even though students have not shown much interest in enrolling in regular study skills courses during the summer [The CST and Orientation classes offered during the first summer session failed to attract enough student interest to make.], the Learning Center staff is hopeful that the lesser investments of time and money in short courses will appeal to some individuals and allow them to gain the skills they need in a somewhat innovative manner.

Other Activities

The Director of the Learning Center had the opportunity to serve on a Coordinating Board Committee rewriting the course approval guidelines for

developmental studies/basic skills courses for the new Course Approval Guidelines Manual. She also participated in a March meeting in Austin concerning the formation of a Basic Skills Council which would formulate guidelines, appoint subcommittee members, and make recommendations to the Commissioner of Education regarding the assessment of entering college students and the placement of students with skills deficiencies into appropriate remediation systems. Subsequently, she was asked to serve on the Basic Skills Council.

Goals and Future Plans

On May 11 and 12, 1987, the Learning Center staff met to discuss goals and future plans. Basically, four general goal statements were identified, with components of these goals centering on two predominant themes: (a) training, and (b) public relations. Specifically, these goals are summarized below:

1. In relation to our first goal (as a part of the Five-Year Plan), "To increase the effectiveness and efficiency of academic support courses for students," the Learning Center staff identified three sub-goals:

(a) To meet with Philosophy/Communications Department faculty (especially those faculty teaching English 031) to discuss the feasibility of standardizing exit criteria for the English 031 course. Presently, the sections taught in the Learning Center by Learning Center staff require that students write a satisfactory paragraph (judged independently by qualified teachers of English, with consensus of two teachers that the writing is satisfactory) before the student is awarded credit for the course.

(b) To establish a mechanism whereby faculty can consider the literacy requirements of the SPC curriculum [This in partial response to McGrath & Spear (1987), Richardson, Fisk, & Okun (1983), Roueche & Comstock (1981), and others who have suggested that not only do developmental courses require that students develop higher-level literacy skills that are seldom called for in the college-level curriculum, but also that the resistance on the part of faculty to require these higher-level skills threatens the academic integrity of all postsecondary educational institutions; this mechanism arises in response to issues of remediation and basic skills testing raised by the Select Committee on Higher Education in Texas.].

(c) To examine the feasibility of offering more than one level of remedial instruction in English, noting that the Coordinating Board Course Approval Guidelines allow community colleges to offer up to 9 credit hours of instruction in below-college-level English and that many SPC students enter with such serious deficiencies in written language use that they cannot attain sufficient progress in one semester to succeed in the college-level curriculum; therefore, there appears to be a need to offer an English 031 and English 032 sequence for students needing basic skills instruction in English.

2. Our second goal, from the Five-Year Plan, "To develop a broader spectrum for the delivery of services to better serve the diverse needs of the total student population," appears to have been met from the standpoint that through our various services (described in detail in this Annual Report), we have support structures in place to meet the academic needs of the entire college population. However, we recognize a

continuing need to publicize our various programs so that students can take advantage of our services; specifically, the Learning Center staff has suggested:

(a) To revise the catalog description of the Learning Center to include all the services provided.

(b) To mail letters to new students welcoming them to SPC and telling them about our services prior to the beginning of the fall term.

(c) To send memos to part-time faculty making them aware of the Learning Center's services and our evening hours of operation during each regular semester.

(d) To increase one-on-one contact with faculty to remind them of the Learning Center's support network for all students.

(e) To provide students with a "Suggestion Box" whereby they can make comments or offer suggestions about improvements in the Learning Center or give feedback about the services.

(f) To strengthen communication with the Student Assistance Center on the Lubbock campus for the exchange of information and ideas for student success.

Also related to the second goal is the need to update and/or expand our holdings in some instructional areas, in particular:

(g) The sound/slide materials from the Center for Humanities (acquired five to seven years ago) need to be replaced; they are simply "worn out" from student use over the years.

(h) There is a need to acquire additional vocabulary materials (related to occupational and vocational fields), and a need to provide

handwriting improvement materials for students whose penmanship is illegible.

Lastly, in this area, is a problem that arises each year when the staff meets to make plans. That problem is the need for more space. Although the entire Student Assistance Center operation is pressed for classroom space (considering the number of basic skills classes, orientation classes, and workshops held in the center), the Learning Center especially suffers from crowding in the microcomputer lab. With respect to the increase in lab utilization this year and the fact that the lab was designed to house 12 microcomputers (and presently we have 14), any future expansion of computer-aided-instruction in the Learning Center will be impossible due to the lack of space.

3. The third goal from the Five Year Plan, "To evaluate future staffing needs to maintain sufficient personnel resources to meet identified institutional needs," is a continuing concern of the Learning Center staff. In light of the Texas Legislature's recent approval of legislation requiring that a basic skills test be administered to all college freshmen and that student with deficiencies be provided strategies for remediation with proof of remediation required before students are allowed to enroll in upper-level courses, the Learning Center staff is likely to face a considerable challenge. This legislation, in effect, will require that we at least double or triple our current assessment program. Furthermore, the current level of assessment which has revealed that approximately two-thirds of our entering students need remediation in at least one basic skill area indicates that if remediation becomes mandatory, enrollment in our

courses will at least double, more likely triple, or more. In other words, we will be seriously understaff-d if we are to be able to provide adequate instruction. Moreover, the specialized skills needed to teach basic skills to adult learners are not readily found in the labor market. In sum, future staffing needs are a major concern, especially in light of the budgetary restraints presented by a Texas economy in crisis.

4. The fourth goal of the Learning Center for 1987-88 addresses training needs, specifically:

(a) Restructuring the Tutor Training program to allow for more time to be spent in interaction and discussion of problematic situations; also, to increase the amount of time spent discussing the importance of attitudes and interpersonal skills when dealing with students who suffer from anxieties and basic deficiencies, with more emphasis being given to sensitizing tutors to tutees' special needs.

(b) Obtaining training in the capabilities of the DEC computer system so that we better utilize software for data collection and analysis.

Concluding Remarks

Several issues affecting the future of education will directly impact on the Learning Center and its operation. A few of those issues, with accompanying comments, are identified in this final section of the Annual Report. The Learning Center staff suggests that these issues are worthy of system-wide discussion and response.

First, the whole notion of critical literacy has already been referred to in this report. Richardson, Fisk, and Okun (1983) defined

critical literacy as "the hallmark of collegiate study. . . . [requiring] clear articulation of educational goals and the development of higher levels of thinking. It requires independence and self-direction" (p. xii). In their analysis of community college practices, Richardson et al. found that community college faculty, as a whole, ignored critical literacy, instead focusing on a type of literacy the authors called "bitting," involving

> The transfer of preselected bits of information without requiring analysis, synthesis, or original expression. For example, notetaking had become a mechanical procedure of copying words and brief phrases from the blackboard in order to recognize these bits on multiple choice tests. Students acted as consumers of language rather than as authors or critics (p. xii).

This phenomenon seems somewhat indicative of the present situation in Texas. Current legislation attempts to identify and define not only college-level skills, but also basic skill deficiencies requiring remediation; that such legislation is necessary substantiates the perception that colleges have failed to demand critical literacy skills (or what routinely has been recognized as the essence of a college education). Since the tasks of assessment and remediation fall on the Learning Center and its staff, this issue is of primary importance to both our mission and our operation; however, this critical literacy crisis is so serious and pervasive as to require the attention and concern of all professionals involved in postsecondary education.

Second, over the last few years, increasing numbers of "special needs" students have enrolled in classes at South Plains College, Levelland. Although the total number of these students is not large, the magnitude of their needs is such that they do present a problem to the faculty and staff of the Learning Center (as well as a problem for other faculty who must deal with them). Most often, their "special needs" (ranging from low intelligence to severe psychological/emotional dysfunction) are such that they cannot be met through academic support services such as remedial courses, tutoring, or independent study. In sum, these students require much more than the academic assistance programs can provide. In other cases, students have naively accepted a prior diagnosis of a problem (such as dyslexia) for which there is insufficient evidence. In cases such as these, the Learning Center staff does intervene and is often successful. In other words, under the "special needs" umbrella, we find all kinds of students with varying needs and levels of need. We acknowledge that we can help some of these students, but we also admit that we cannot help all of them. How to effectively, but sensitively, identify their needs and distinguish between whom we can serve and whom we cannot, merits our continued attention, and is an issue affecting not only South Plains College, but colleges throughout the state and nation.

A third, and somewhat lesser concern, is the increasing number of nonstudents who request services from the Learning Center, in particular, parents of elementary school-age children who want their children to receive reading assistance and parents of secondary

school-age children who want their children to be tutored. To illustrate the case in point, although several members of the Learning Center staff are trained in assessing reading skills and planning reading instruction (for all age groups), the amount of time required in giving individually-administered reading tests to young children and in writing evaluation summaries is considerable and does not include the even greater amount of time involved in actual remediation. In sum, it is not that the staff is unqualified to offer these services or that the staff resists the task; the fact is that the needs of students enrolled in courses at South Plains College necessarily take precedence over the needs of nonstudents, and the needs of students are sufficient to consume the time that staff are available. This issue is included in the Annual Report even though it is not a critical issue at present but because it most likely will become a problem in the near future.

Finally, an issue affecting the Learning Center's future operation, along with the future of all postsecondary educational programs in Texas, is program funding. A recent study of remedial education in the state (Skinner & Carter, 1987) concluded with recommendations that (a) All students who need remediation receive it; (b) Valid exit and placement criteria be established; and (c) Comprehensive tracking of all students be undertaken. Albeit these are important goals, they cannot be accomplished without adequate state and local funding. Living in a particularly hard-hit region of a state suffering from an economic decline, we in education must be willing to make our share of sacrifices. Yet, as we trim any excess

from our institutional budgets, we cannot afford to cut expenditures for basic skills which assure quality in education; the long-term costs of compromising standards are too high, and society can no longer afford to pay the high-price of offering courses to students who are unequipped with the skills they need to profit from that instruction. To do so is simply bad business and is contrary to sound economic principles.

In their introduction, the authors of the Texas study (Skinner & Carter, 1987) insist that the issues surrounding remedial education "represent one of the most serious challenges facing postsecondary institutions nationwide" (p. 1); the authors continue to explain:

> Policies developed to govern remedial education are intertwined with a college's dual responsibility to provide access to higher education and to preserve the quality of the educational experience afforded to students. It is no exaggeration to say that a college's ability to address the issues of remedial education will be critical to its continued viability (p. 1).

Clearly, these authors emphasize that support for operations such as the Learning Center is necessary for a college's survival.

In conclusion, the Learning Center is committed to the ideal that education is always a part of the solution. It would be more than a shame to become blinded to the solution because of the glare of present economic difficulties.

TABLE 1: SPC FRESHMEN READING SCORES
1982-83 THROUGH 1986-87

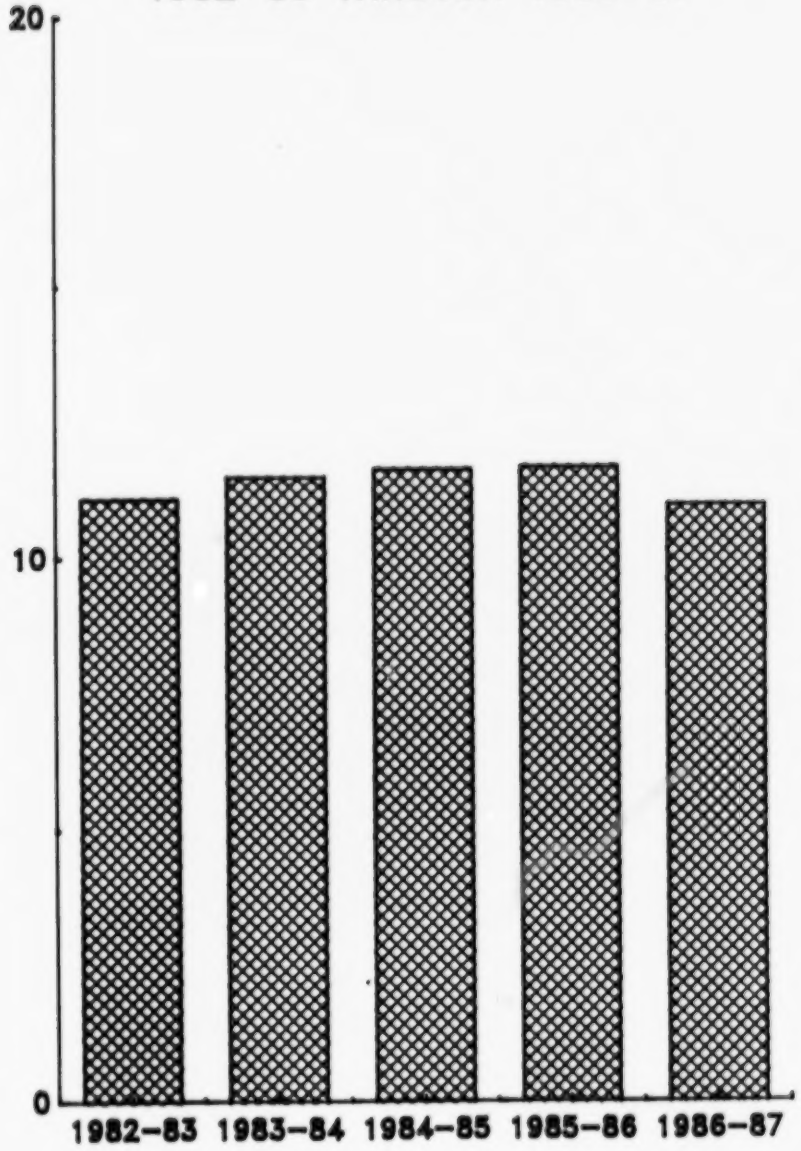


TABLE 2: HIGH-RISK STUDENTS (BASED ON READING SCORES)

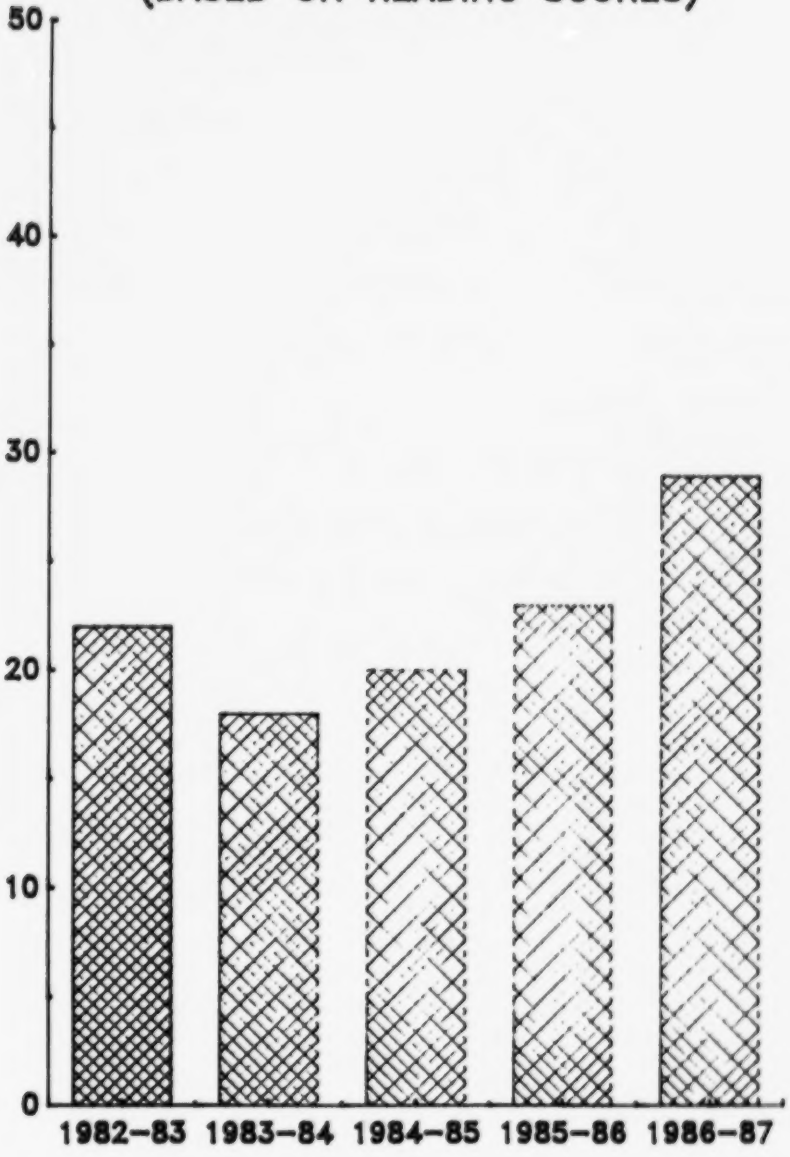


TABLE 3: FRESHMEN NEEDING SKILLS IN BASIC ENGLISH
1982-83 THROUGH 1986-87

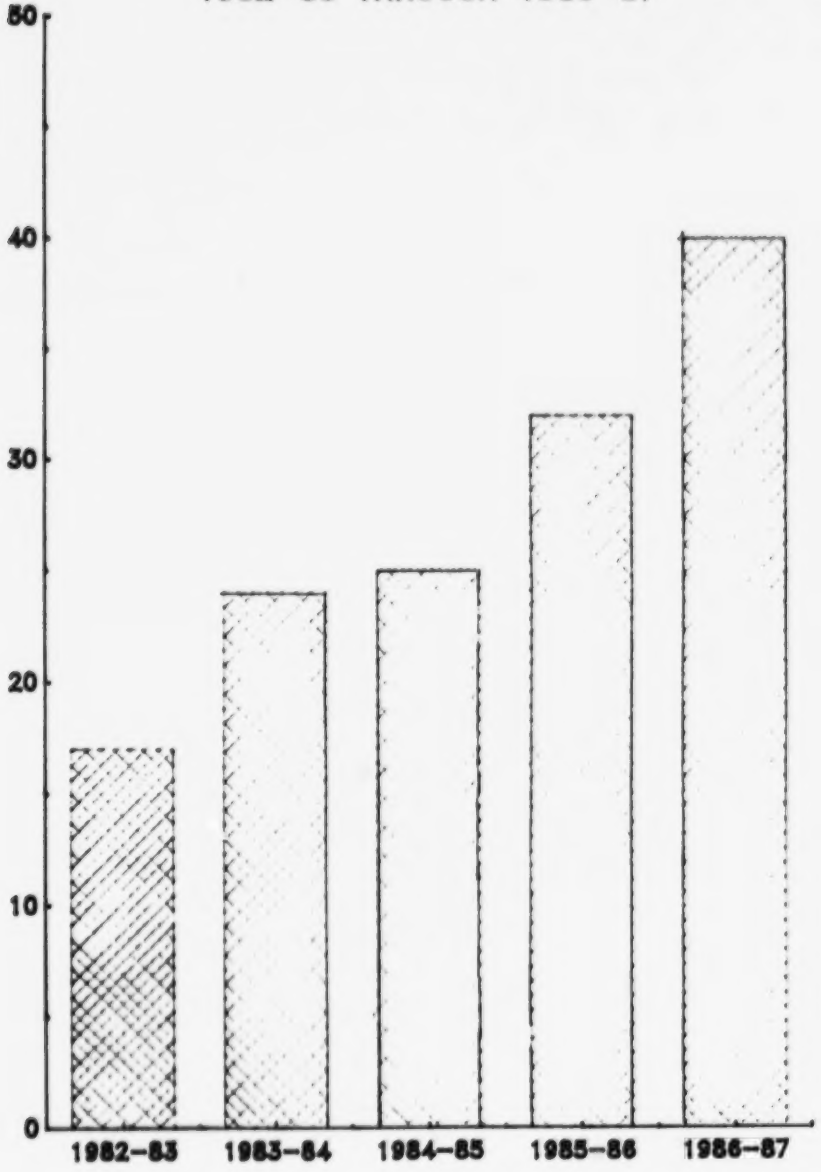
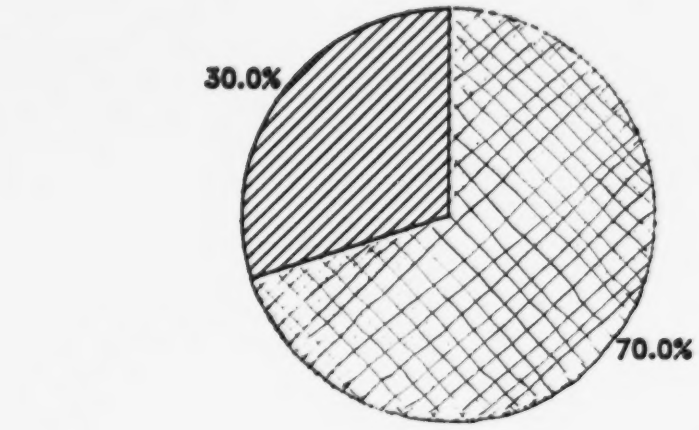
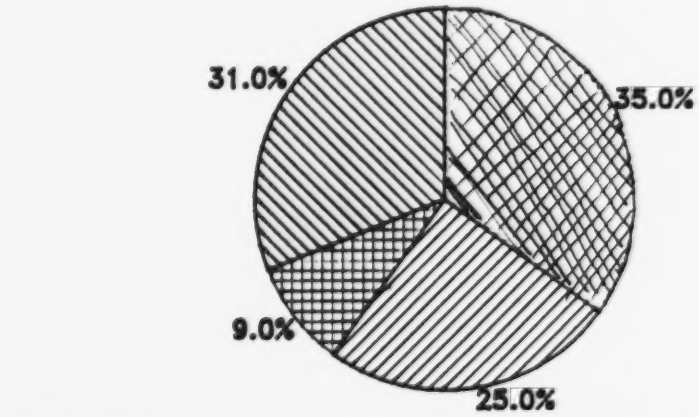


TABLE 4: FRESHMEN DEFICIENT IN BASIC SKILLS (ENGLISH,READING,OR MATH)





ATTACHMENT A
TUTORING (NUMBER OF HOURS BY SUBJECT)
LEARNING CENTER, FALL 1986

SUBJECT	HOURS
accounting	127:83
biology	169:42
business vocations/general business	99:67
commercial art	42:50
chemistry	185:00
computer information systems	126:50
computer science	64:58
drafting	73:67
English	775:42
Electronic Service Technology	63:75
government/history	12:50
law enforcement	337:33
math	922:33
microbiology	53:17
psychology	58:08
reading	8:83
sound technology/music	312:33
sociology	628:92
Spanish	10:50
zoology (Anatomy & Physiology)	182:83
physics	77:33

ATTACHMENT B
TUTORING (NUMBER OF HOURS BY SUBJECT)
LEARNING CENTER, SPRING 1987

SUBJECT	HOURS
accounting	30:00
biology	39:75
business vocations/general business	23:42
commercial art	10:00
chemistry	43:42
computer information systems	29:67
computer science	15:17
drafting	17:25
English	158:67
Electronic Service Technology	14:92
government/history	10:00
law enforcement	149:67
math	216:67
microbiology	19:50
psychology	13:67
reading	20:83
sound technology/music	49:83
sociology	100:75
Spanish	6:17
zoology (Anatomy & Physicology)	42:92
physics	5:25

ATTACHMENT C
TUTORING--ANNUAL TOTALS
LEARNING CENTER, 1986-87

SUBJECT	HOURS	PERCENTAGES
accounting	157:83	3%
biology	209:17	4%
business vocations/general business	123:08	2%
commercial art	52:50	1%
chemistry	228:42	4%
computer information systems	156:17	3%
computer science	79:75	2%
drafting	90:92	2%
English	934:08	17%
Electronic Service Technology	78:67	2%
government/history	22:50	*
law enforcement	487:00	9%
math	1139:00	21%
microbiology	72:67	1%
psychology	71:75	1%
reading	29:67	1%
sound technology/music	362:17	7%
sociology	729:67	14%
Spanish	16:67	*
zoology (Anatomy & Physiology)	225:75	4%
physics	82:58	2%

* (Percentages) less than 1%

References

Ahrendt, K. M. (1987). Editor's notes. In K. M. Ahrendt (Ed.), Teaching the developmental education student (pp. 1-2). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Baker, G. A., & Reed, L. W. (1980). Nontraditional learner: An organizational perspective. Community College Record, 8, 36-41.

Cohen, A. M. (1987). Responding to criticism of developmental education. In K. M. Ahrendt (Ed.), Teaching the developmental education student (pp. 3-10). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Committee on Testing [Coordinating Board Texas College and University System]. (1986). A generation of failure: The case for testing and remediation in Texas higher education.

Cross, K. P. (1971). Beyond the open door. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Garner, A. (1980). A comprehensive community college model for learning assistance centers (pp. 19-32). In K. V. Lauridsen (Ed.), Examining the scope of learning centers. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Jorgensen, P. R. (1980). The undereducated college student. College Student Journal, 14, 179-182.

McGrath, D., & Spear, M. B. (1987). The politics of remediation. In K. M. Ahrendt (Ed.), Teaching the developmental education student (pp. 11-22). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). A nation at risk (Publication No. 065-000-00177-2). Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office.

The National Institute of Education. (1984). Involvement in learning. (Publication No. 065-000-00213-2). Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office.

Platt, G. M. (1986). Should colleges teach below-college-level courses? Community College Review, 14, 19-25.

Plisko, V. W., & Stern, J. D. (1985). The condition of education (Publication No. 065-000-00241-8). Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office.

Richardson, R. C., Jr., Fisk, E. C., & Okun, M. A. (1983). Literacy in the open-access college. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Roueche, S. D., & Comstock, U. N. (1981). A report on theory and methods for the study of literacy development in community colleges. National Institute of Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 211 161)

Skinner, E. F., & Carter, S. (1987). A second chance for Texans: Remedial education in two-year colleges. Tempe, AZ: National Center for Postsecondary Governance at Arizona State University.

Washington State Student Services Commission. (1985). Student Assessment Task Force Report. Olympia, WA: Washington State Student Services Commission. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 269 049)

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges SEP 23 1988